THE PARODOS OF THE *AGAMEMNON*

In the long section of anapaests with which they make their entry, the old men of Argos methodically deliver three essential messages to the audience:

40–71. It is the tenth year of the Trojan War.

72–82. We are men who were too old to go and fight in it.

83–103. Some new situation seems to be indicated by the fact that Clytemnestra is organizing sacrifices throughout the town.

The righteousness of the Atreidai's cause is asserted through the simile in 48 ff. They are like vultures whose young have been stolen from the nest, and whose cries are heard by some god, Apollo or Pan or Zeus, who sends eventual punishment upon the transgressors. In the same way Zeus Xenios is sending the Atreidai against Alexander. As the commentators point out, Aeschylus was influenced by two Homeric vulture similes, *Il.* 16.428–9 *οἱ δ' ὥστ' αἰγυπιοί . . . μεγάλα κλάζοντε μάχωνται*[1] and *Od.* 16.216–18 *κλαῖον δὲ λιγέως, ἀδινώτερον ἤ τ' οἰωνοί, | φῆναι ἢ αἰγυπιοὶ γαμψώνυχες, οἵσί τε τέκνα | ἀγρόται ἐξείλοντο πάρος πετεηνὰ γενέσθαι.*

It seems to have gone unremarked that a third passage of earlier poetry was also at work in his mind, and with more far-reaching effects on the development of the parodos. I refer to the most famous poem of the most famous archaic poet after Hesiod and Homer: that epode of Archilochus in which Lycambes was admonished by means of the fable of the fox and the eagle.[2] The fox and the eagle became friends, but then the eagle carried off the fox's young to feed its own. The fox appealed to Zeus (177):

> *ὦ Ζεῦ, πάτερ Ζεῦ, σὸν μὲν οὐρανοῦ κράτος,*
> *σὺ δ' ἔργ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων ὁρᾶις*
> *λεωργὰ καὶ θεμιστά, σοὶ δὲ θηρίων*
> *ὕβρις τε καὶ δίκη μέλει.*

This idea that Zeus concerns himself with the wrongs of animals is found only here in early poetry. It contradicts Hesiod, for whom men are differentiated from other creatures by having been given Dike by Zeus (*Op.* 276 ff.): birds and beasts devour one another, and Zeus cares not a button. In Archilochus he heeds the appeal, and the eagle is duly punished. It is natural to suppose that this is the source of the bird-avenging god in Aeschylus, and the supposition is confirmed by other points of contact, as will soon be seen.

It is the phrase *μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη* in 47 that initially prompts the comparison with vultures. The addition of *Odyssey* vultures to *Iliad* vultures gives us stolen young as a parallel to the stolen Helen. Aeschylus' next need is to bring in the idea of the justice of Zeus that supports the Atreidai. In the context of his bird image, this makes him think of the Archilochean fable. He may already have it in mind when he writes of the bereaved birds wheeling over their nest, *πτερύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι* (52), for Archilochus' story ends

[1] I do not see the need to alter Aeschylus' *μέγαν* to accord precisely with Homer's *μεγάλα*.

[2] Frr. 172–81 in my edition, with the testimonia; commentary in my *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus*, pp.132–4.

with the burning of the eagle's young in their nest, and the chagrined eagle away on the wing, λαιψηρὰ κυκλώσας πτερά (181.11).

Having once thought of the fable, Aeschylus might have noticed that it had other relevant features. It was told as a parallel to the situation of Archilochus himself, who, like the Atreidai, had not in fact lost a child but a bride. The Zeus who was involved was Zeus Xenios, for the original partnership, ξυνεωνίη, between the fox and the eagle was an essential feature of the fable (174), paralleling Archilochus' reproach to Lycambes because ὅρκον ἐνοσφίσθης μέγαν, | ἄλας τε καὶ τράπεξαν (173). Further, the punishment visited upon the eagle, the destruction of its nest by fire, might have struck Aeschylus by its similarity to the consequence of Paris' crime.

He refers to the vultures' young as παῖδες (50). Fraenkel writes 'παῖς is not used elsewhere of the young of beasts'. He is mistaken. It was used in Archilochus' fable, of the eagle's young (179). In a fable animals are naturally described in more human terms than elsewhere. Aeschylus had to replace the articulate prayer of Archilochus' fox by an οἰωνόθροος γόος ὀξυβόας, but he found the use of παῖδες acceptable.[1]

The chorus returns to the departure of the Atreidai and their army in the opening triad of the great cantata that follows the anapaests. The formulation of the theme in 104, ὅδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν ἐντελέων, puts in a nutshell the main points of 40–62: the movement of the powerful force, the justice of the cause, the royal authority of the two leaders. Once again the Atreidai appear as a pair of mighty birds, only this time it is not a simile but a portent, interpreted by Calchas. The motif of a portent appearing at the outset of the expedition was not Aeschylus' invention. In the *Cypria*, which must have been his main source for the early part of the Trojan War, the army beheld at Aulis a snake devouring a sparrow with eight chicks and then turning to stone. Calchas interpreted this to mean that the Greeks would fight for nine years and be victorious in the tenth.[2] This is Aeschylus' starting-point, but he transforms the portent. For the snake and the brood of sparrows he substitutes a pair of eagles and a pregnant hare, a grander picture in itself,[3] and (more importantly) one that relates directly to the Atreidai who are the focal figures in his narrative. Calchas can no longer predict the exact length of the war, because the victim's young no longer have a definite number, but his prophecy in the epic was obviously the model for

χρόνωι μὲν ἀγρεῖ Πριάμου πόλιν ἅδε κέλευθος.[4]

Aeschylus might have chosen eagles to represent the Atreidai even if he had not compared them to birds of prey in 49 ff., but since he had, we cannot expect to find his mind free from the associations of the earlier passage. In fact the

[1] Further examples of παῖς of an animal's young may be found in a poet particularly given to describing the animal world in human terms, Oppian (*Hal.* 5.556, 558, 570, etc.).

[2] Proclus' summary + Apollod. epit. 3.15. The episode was traditional, and already familiar to the poet of the *Iliad* (2.308 ff.).

[3] Homeric models: *Il.* 8.247 f., 12.219 ff., *Od.* 15.160 f., 525 ff., 20.242 f.

[4] 126. In the line before read τεράξων, not τεράιζων. There can be no justification for a long alpha. Few editors seem to have a firm grasp on the principles of word formation. Why, for example, do they change δορυπάλτου in 116 to δοριπάλτου, which could only mean 'shaking/shaken *by* spear'?

echoes of Archilochus continue. We have actually moved closer to the fable, for we now have *eagles* who have seized a weak four-footed creature for their meal. That is not all. Porphyry on *Il.* 24.315 tells us that Archilochus referred to the black eagle in the line (178)

μή τεο μελαμπύγου τύχηις.

According to Tzetzes on Lyc. 91 he knew the white-rumped πύγαργος as well, though this may just be an inference from the reference to the μελάμπυγος. It would be a valid enough inference. Archilochus clearly did know the distinction between the two varieties of eagle, and the line quoted implies the distinction in respect of ferocity as well as mere colouring. It is a dimeter, and therefore from an epode, and it is highly probable that it came from the epode about the fox and the eagle. The fox was probably warning the miscreant eagle that he might encounter one stronger than himself.[1] That was the only place in archaic poetry, so far as we know, where the black- and the white-rumped eagle were contrasted;[2] and Aeschylus applies just this contrast to the eagles of his portent, to symbolize the difference in ferocity between the two sons of Atreus.

Some time after taking the fox's cubs, Archilochus' eagle seized a piece of another animal from a burning altar,[3] and, bringing it back to the eyrie,

προύθηκε παισὶ δεῖπνον αἰηνὲς φέρων

(179). We have noted that the word παισί is abnormal in the animal world. The same is true of δεῖπνον. In Homer it is used only of humans' meals.[4] The extension to animals begins in fable: besides Archilochus, Hesiod has it in his story of the hawk and the nightingale (*Op.* 209). In *Suppl.* 800 f. Aeschylus had written

κυσὶν δ' ἔπειθ' ἕλωρα κἀπιχωρίοις
ὄρνισι δεῖπνον οὐκ ἀναίνομαι πέλειν.

This appears to be inspired by *Il.* 1.5 in the version later read by Zenodotus. But when in *Ag.* 137 he writes στυγεῖ δὲ δεῖπνον αἰετῶν, this looks like another echo of Archilochus.

In the *Cypria* Calchas' interpretation of the portent referred only to the duration and outcome of the war. No question of Artemis' hostility arose till much later, after the Greeks had sacked Teuthrania under the curious misapprehension that it was Troy and returned to Aulis to start again. Then Agamemnon killed a stag and boasted that not even Artemis could have done it so well.[5] She was angry, and prevented the ships from sailing. Calchas announced that she required the sacrifice of Agamemnon's fairest daughter, and it was carried out. Aeschylus masterfully concentrates and unifies this rambling story, eliminating the Mysian excursion and Agamemnon's insult towards Artemis, so

[1] *Studies*, p.133.

[2] μελανόρσου has been conjectured in *Il.* 21.252. See Fraenkel on *Ag.* 115.

[3] In the Aesopic version of the fable it is a goat. We do not know whether it was a goat in Archilochus.

[4] Likewise δαίς, unless Zenodotus' reading in *Il.* 1.5 is right, (αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν)|οἰωνοῖσί τε δαῖτα. Aristarchus rejected it on the ground that ἐπὶ μόνων ἀνθρώπων δαῖτα λέγει ὁ ποιητής, ἐπὶ δὲ θηρίων οὐκέτι.

[5] A typical epic motif. Compare the boasts of Thamyris and Niobe, *Il.* 2.597 and 24.607 f.

that the ἄπλοια which necessitates the sacrifice of Iphigeneia becomes an arbitrary imposition from the gods, already foreshadowed in the seer's first prophecy. The new reason for Artemis' displeasure is that 'she abhors the eagles' meal', because the hare was about to give birth. In the interests of compression Aeschylus has seized upon the first thing that could be represented as angering the goddess. Yet it would hardly have occurred to him to put this construction on the killing of a hare by a pair of eagles if his mind had not already been engaged by Archilochus' fable with its theme of divine vengeance for a wronged animal. In 55 f. he had envisaged the possibility of other gods besides Zeus exercising this protection: Apollo, perhaps, or Pan. So here in the portent was a ready-made πρόφασις for Artemis' anger.

Logically she ought to vent it on the eagles, not on Agamemnon, whose record of conduct towards pregnant animals is spotless. But her opposition to him is an immutable feature of the story, and has to follow whatever reason Aeschylus chooses to give for her displeasure. It cannot follow logically if he chooses to avoid attributing a definite fault to Agamemnon. Still, we are justified in asking whether the business of Artemis and the hare does not have some deeper significance in relation to Agamemnon's whole destiny. Aeschylus sees Agamemnon's murder as fitting into the general pattern of events, so as to be just from one viewpoint or another, in three separate ways:

1. It balances his killing of Iphigeneia. This is primarily Clytemnestra's excuse (1412 ff., 1432 f., 1523 ff.): other people do not admit that it justifies her action, though the connection between the two deaths is recognized by Calchas (154 f.)[1] and by the chorus (1559 ff.).[2]

2. It balances Atreus' killing of Thyestes' children. This is primarily Aegisthus' excuse, he being Thyestes' surviving son (1223 ff., cf. 1338 ff.; 1582 ff.); Clytemnestra also claims to be regarded as the incarnation of the ἀλάστωρ concerned with that event (1497 ff.). Thyestes pronounced a curse upon the Pleisthenid family (1600–2), so that Agamemnon's death by violence was bound to follow. Aeschylus also, with the coming death of Aegisthus in mind, speaks of the δαίμων of the house of Tantalus who ordains a continuing series of murders (1468 ff., cf. 1186 ff., 1507 ff.; 1565 ff., where Iphigeneia is included in the series; *Cho.* 1065 ff. where she is not). The justice of the 'blood for blood' principle is recognized by the choruses in *Ag.* 1562–4, *Cho.* 306–14, 400–4; in the *Choephoroe*, of course, it favours the hero.

3. It balances Agamemnon's abnormal prosperity and success in taking Troy. The chorus hint at this by their remarks on the temporary nature of all victory except Zeus' in 167–75,[3] and more definitely by their reflections in 456–74 and 1331–42. Cassandra hints at it in 1286–8. Above all the 'carpet scene' serves to put Agamemnon on the wrong side of the line dividing enough from excess.

Of these three considerations, Aeschylus has more sympathy with the second than with the first,[4] but he needs the third too to satisfy his own sense

[1] The audience could not but think of Clytemnestra when he spoke of the sacrifice as νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον οὐ δεισήνορα, and of an οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποινος.

[2] Elsewhere Clytemnestra is represented as paying Agamemnon back for his attention to Cassandra (1263, 1438 ff.).

[3] I regard it as mistaken to see in these lines a reference to Uranos and Kronos. How can it be said of Uranos that he will cease to be spoken of (if οὐδὲ λέξεται is the right reading)?

[4] He does not deny that the sacrifice of Iphigeneia was an unholy act, but he does all he can to persuade us that Agamemnon had no alternative and did it much against his will.

of divine justice. Agamemnon's overthrow is acceptable in the end not because of Atreus or Iphigeneia but because he has enjoyed triumph and exulted in magnificence.

If Artemis' φθόνος in the eagle portent (134) symbolizes anything of universal meaning, it is surely this. The powerful naturally crush the weak, and the Atreidai will sack Troy; but the weak have their divine protectors, the gods in time redress the balance and exact a price. Such was the lesson of the Archilochean fable that lay below the portent in Aeschylus' mind. And such is the burden of the so-called hymn to Zeus which interrupts the narrative in 160–83. All greatness is brought low. He that was once mighty and warlike will be forgotten. He that succeeded him is overthrown in his turn. The only permanent winner is Zeus, with his truth that men never learn until it is too late, until they have transgressed and suffered. By his rough, unpredictable instruction they grow wiser perforce. But how can they love gods who govern so harshly?[1]—(184) And harsh it was for Agamemnon, when the winds prevented sailing and Calchas told him what he had to do: he found himself riven by a choice of monstrous evils.

Aeschylus does not make him blame the gods in so many words, but he does make a point of saying that he did not blame Calchas: 186 μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων. Here again Aeschylus has the *Cypria* in mind and is changing the story. For we may take it as certain that Calchas' exposition of the cause and cure of Artemis' anger in that epic—in any epic—was followed by a speech from Agamemnon similar in tone to *Il.* 1.106 f.,

> μάντι κακῶν, οὔ πώ ποτέ μοι τὸ κρήγυον εἶπας·
> αἰεί τοι τὰ κάκ' ἐστὶ φίλα φρεσὶ μαντεύεσθαι.

Homer is no doubt alluding to the episode at Aulis; less than forty lines before, he has introduced Calchas as the seer who νήεσσ' ἠγήσατ' Ἀχαιῶν Ἴλιον εἴσω | ἣν διὰ μαντοσύνην (71 f.), and in Book 2 he will not only recall the portent of the snake and sparrows but adapt the catalogue of the Greek armada as it assembled at Aulis to the Trojan setting. Clearly the Ἀχαιῶν σύλλογος was part of his repertory, and in reciting it he would have represented Agamemnon as reacting to Calchas' prescription in much the same way as in *Iliad* 1. The *Cypria* was the work of a later poet, but the episode cannot have been related very differently in it. Possibly Aeschylus' moving words in 202–4, ὥστε χθόνα βάκτροις ἐπικρούσαντας Ἀτρείδας δάκρυ μὴ κατασχεῖν, reflect something in the epic account. Lines like *Il.* 1.245, ὣς φάτο Πηλείδης, ποτὶ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίῃι, and 357 ὣς φάτο δάκρυ χέων, illustrate the means available to the epic poet.

But to return to Archilochus' epode. Had it come down to us complete, we might be able to find yet more echoes of it in the parodos of the *Agamemnon.* Even as it is, the recognition of this influence throws an unexpected light on the awesome workshop of Aeschylus' mind. Such striking ideas as the god hearing the vultures' complaint, the diverse colouring of the two eagles who stand for the Atreidai, and Artemis' avenging of the hare, are traced to their source, without discredit to Aeschylus' originality when we consider the

[1] The text as given by M and V, with interrogative ποῦ and adverbial βιαίως, is successfully vindicated by M. H. Pope in *JHS* 94 (1974), 100 ff. I am not persuaded by the counter-arguments of N. B. Booth in *CQ* N.S. 26 (1976), 220 ff.

new significance he has given to his borrowings in the organic structure of his poem. The continuing productiveness of the fable over nearly a hundred lines of the play brings home to us once more the scale, depth, and integrity of Aeschylus' thought.

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